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Amembassy GUATEMALA

Despatch No. 341

SUBJECT: Joint Weeka No. 51

December 22, 1960

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presented the Order of the Quetzal in the degree of Grand Collar, Guatemala's highest decoration, to the President of Congress. Some tense moments came during the three hour Presidential visit when a photographer's flash bulb exploded and everyone thought shooting had erupted. Congress is scheduled to reconvene on January 17.

b. Coup Rumors Continue - A few reports of possible military or civilian coups or a combination of both continue to circulate. Some reports say action might take place before Christmas Day, but nothing was definitive enough to cause more than usual concern.

c. More Rebels Released for Christmas - Twenty-two more alleged civilian rebels from the November 13 uprising were released, leaving only two still facing trial. Another three so-called guerrillas captured in the Sierra de Las Minas were absolved but their leader, María Manuel MENDOZA Fischer, was given three years in prison. In addition, three more alleged civilian revolutionaries were captured in Morales on December 17 and indicted.

d. Youth Leaders Return - Exiled youth leaders Edgar IBARRA and Carlos TOLEDO Hernández of leftist student organization FUEGO returned unmolested on December 21 after having been exiled to Managua. Their open return appeared part of the general Christmas spirit of forgiveness that prevails.

e. GOG "Torture House" Arouses Storm - The GOG came under new fire this week over an alleged "torture house" in Guatemala City as some recently-freed political prisoners charged at a press conference that they had received tortures and beatings. The Minister of Government promptly denied the charges but also promised an "exhaustive investigation." Marco Antonio VILLAMAR Contreras, official of extreme leftist PUR, was spokesman for the victims and charged the "methods of the Ubico regime" were being reinstituted. The press said he showed "deep traces" of ill treatment. PUD issued a public denunciation of the alleged tortures and some thirty capital city attorneys were reported ready to volunteer to investigate the alleged GOG actions.

f. No "Invasion Base" in Retalhuleu - The GOG official daily "Diario de Centro América," on December 17, gave prominent play to an article written by a London newsman to the effect that there were no "invasion base" against Cuba and no Americans in training at the GOG Retalhuleu training base. It quoted Geoffrey Thursby in the "London Daily Express" of November 23 as stating that after a visit to the base he had found only two groups of twenty men each being trained and they were "Latin American types." He added it was impossible to discern if there were any Cubans in the group.

Comment: The congressional inaction appeared to be a direct affront to the President in view of his dramatic personal appearance. This Congress, however, like most, has earned a reputation for doing nothing.

Undoubtedly helping the current political calm is the clemency being shown to the November 13 revolutionaries and the Minister of Treasury's announcement

on December 21 that all GCG salaries and wages had been paid by December 22 for the month of December and that the same prospects held for January. (CONFIDENTIAL)

2. Congressional Delegation to US in January

The GCG "Diario" announced on December 20 that Congress has given permission for a special Congressional delegation to go to the United States in January at the invitation of the Department of State. The delegation will be led by the President of Congress, Jorge Luis Zelaya Coronado, and includes heads of important committees. It is scheduled to leave January 9 and return February 24.

Comment: As this group contains some of the "prime movers" in Congress, there is some fear that the "do nothing" Congress will continue to accomplish little during their prolonged absence. (CONFIDENTIAL)

3. New PUD Officers Elected

The new Partido Unido Democratico (PUD) (Weeka No.37) has elected the following officers: President, Dr. Salvador Serrano Muñoz; Vice President, Dr. Edgar Willy Marroquín; and Secretary, Juan José Martínez Barrientos. They will continue in office until March 1, 1961. All three are members of Congress and Serrano is a former director of the Partido Liberación Anti-comunista Guatemalteco (PLAG), while Barrientos was awarded a diploma by an anti-Communist civic committee for his activities against Communism. (OFFICIAL USE ONLY)

PSYCHOLOGICAL

4. U.S. Loans to Guatemala Publicized

The announcement this week of extensive U.S. loans to Guatemala received wide page-one publicity in Guatemala's press. Examples of front page banner headlines in "El Imparcial" and "Diario de Centro América," respectively, were as follows: "Economic Cooperation to Country," and "United States Aid to Guatemala." (UNCLASSIFIED)

5. American Society Christmas Charity-Bazaar a Success

The first Christmas charity bazaar for children of the recently-organized American Society, held at the American Embassy Residence, proved an outstanding success. With some returns still out, a preliminary assessment shows around 1000 persons attended and some $1200 was raised, part of which will be donated to the children's ward at the GCG's Roosevelt Hospital. (UNCLASSIFIED)

6. APG Tilts to the Left

The Asociación de Periodistas de Guatemala (APG) elected the following officers for 1961:

President - Angel RAMIREZ R., staff of "El Imparcial" and representative of an Argentine press service; Vice-President - Ramiro MACDONALD Blanco, director of radio news program "Guatemala Flash" and stockholder in newspaper "Flash de Hoy"; and a directorate of six members.

Ramirez was opposed by Mario ALVARADO Rubio, [illegible] communist staff member of "El Imparcial." The vote was 51 to 44. The AEG membership is about 120. (OFFICIAL USE ONLY)

Comment: Mario FITES Montes, outgoing president, is distressed by the political complexion of the new directorate and by the closeness of the vote. Last year he defeated MacDonald by a vote of 90 to 78. MacDonald is the most outspoken radio critic of the GOG (Weekas 45 and 50). Fites is anti-Communist but has not shown effective leadership. He said all members of the new directorate, with one exception, are either leftists or easily swayable. (CONFIDENTIAL)

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